

Message Text

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ACTION AID-05

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FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 910

UNCLAS CAIRO 10347

FROM AMCONGEN ALEXANDRIA

E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: EWWT, EG

SUBJECT: ALEXANDRIA PORT CONGESTION

REF: CAIRO 9962

1. SITUATION ALEXANDRIA PORT STILL CRITICAL, DESPITE PAUSE IN RECENT RAIN AND CRASH MEASURES UNDERTAKEN SINCE NOVEMBER TO CLEAR BACKLOG. EGYPTIAN OFFICIALS VARIOUSLY ESTIMATE OVER 100 SHIPS CURRENTLY IN OR ANCHORED OUTSIDE HARBOR. PORT CONGESTION UNLIKELY EASE APPRECIABLY AT LEAST UNTIL JANUARY, AS SHIPPERS NOW RUSHING CARGO TO ALEXANDRIA TO MEET CONTRACT TERMS WHICH PEGGED TO YEAR ENDING 31 DECEMBER.

2. MAIN DELAYS ENCOUNTERED BY COMMODITY CARRYING VESSELS:

A. WHEAT. PORT HAS ONE SILO AND FOUR OTHER BERTHS FOR BULK WHEAT SHIPMENTS. MAXIMUM OFFLOAD/SURFACE TRANSPORTATION CAPACITY 11,000 TONS PER DAY OR ABOUT 300 TONS PER MONTH. ONE SHIPPING OFFICIAL STATES AT LEAST 15 UNCLASSIFIED

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WHEAT SHIPS NOW AWAITING BERTHS AND MORE IMMINENTLY

EXPECTED, BUT OTHER ESTIMATES PUTS TWO AT TEN.
ALTHOUGH PORT OFFICIALS SITE 2-3 WEEK PERIOD BETWEEN
ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE WHEAT SHIPS, TURNABOUT TIME
IN FACT NOW CLOSER TO TWO MONTHS UNLESS SHIP GIVEN
PREFERENTIAL BETHING.

B. FERTILIZERS. PORT HAS FOUR BERTHS FOR FERTILIZER
SHIPS, WITH MAXIMUM OFFLOAD CAPACITY LESS THAN 10,000
TONS PER DAY. ONE SHIPPING COMPANY MANAGER STATED
17 DECEMBER THAT 25 SHIPS CARRYING FERTILIZER NOW IN
LINE FOR BERTHS.

C. OTHER COMMODITIES. SIMILAR DELAYS. ONE RECENT
SHIP CARRYING SUGAR, WHICH IN SHORT SUPPLY LOCALLY,
REPORTEDLY REMAINED IN HARBOR 40 DAYS BEFORE BERTH
AVAILABLE.

3. DELAYS FOR GENERAL CARGO LESS THAN FOR COMMODITY
VESSELS. SENIOR PORT OFFICIAL 18 DECEMBER SAID THAT NUMBER
OF GENERAL CARGO SHIPS IN OUTER OR INNER HARBORS
AWAITING DOCK SPACE HAS BEEN CUT FROM 50 TO 25 IN PAST
FEW WEEKS. ON OTHER HAND, LOCAL SHIPPING COMPANY
OFFICIAL CLAIMS THAT WHEREAS GENERAL CARGO SHIPS WERE
BEING ACCOMMODATED "ON ARRIVAL" BASIS MONTHS AGO,
DELAYS OF UP TO ONE WEEK OR MORE NOW NOT UNCOMMON.
HE MENTIONED ROUMANIAN VESSEL CARRYING BADLY NEEDED
CARGO OF BOXES AND PAPERBOARD WHICH ARRIVED AT
OUTER HARBOR ON 4 DECEMBER STILL WAITING FOR BERTH.

4. COMMENT: ALEXANDRIA OFFICIALS APPEAR TO BE
UNWILLING (OR UNABLE) RE-ORDER BERTH PRIORITIES WITHOUT
APPROVAL FROM CAIRO. OUR LOCAL CONTACTS CITE CASE
OF UN "FREE FOOD" SHIPS GETTING PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT
AND SUGGESTED THAT BI-LATERAL "AID" NORMALLY MERITS
SIMILAR EXPEDITIOUS HANDLING. THEY SAY THAT
HANDS OF ALEXANDRIA OFFICIAL DOM "TIED", HOWEVER,
WITH ONLY MINISTER OF SUPPLY OR HIGHER AUTHORITY
(READ PM HEGAZI) HAVING CLOUT TO MOVE SHIPS TO
HEAD OF WAITING LINE. SIGNED FICHTE.

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